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GOV. FELEPE DE NEVE

BY H. D. BARROWS.

(Read May 3, 1897.)

The appointment of Felipe de Neve as Governor of the Californias by Viceroy Bucareli was in every respect an admirable one. The Viceroy, himself an officer of enlarged views, had seen the evil effects of the petty quarrels and obstructive tactics that had signalized the administration of Gov. Barri; and he therefore exercised the utmost care in the selection of the latter's successor; and in the preparation of instructions for his guidance, in his relation both with the commandante and with the padres.

Gov. De Neve, who had been a major of cavalry, came to Loreto, Baja, California, and assumed the duties of Gefe Politico or Governor of the two Californias, March 4, 1775. The military commandante, Rivera y Moncada, for a time practically administered the affairs of the northern province, but as the extent and importance of this newly-settled region were better appreciated, an order was issued by the King, during this year, directing that Gov. de Neve should reside at Monterey, and that Commandante Rivera y Moncada should reside at Loreto and act as Governor of the peninsula. De Neve arrived by land at Monterey in the early part of 1777, and Rivera y Moncada soon after set out for Lower California. During Gov. de Neve's administration many important events in California history took place, including the founding of five missions, two presidios and two pueblos, or towns.

The missions and the dates of their establishment were as follows, to wit: Dolores (San Francisco,) Oct. 9, 1776; San Juan Capistrano, Nov. 1, 1776; Santa Clara, July 18, 1777; San Gabriel, Archangel, Sept. 8, 1778; San Buenaventura, March 31, 1782.

The presidios, or military posts, established were: San Francisco, 1776; Santa Barbara, 1780. And the pueblos were: San José de Guadalupe, Nov. 29, 1777; Los Angeles, Sept. 4, 1781.

It was under de Neve's Governorship that steps were taken to lay the foundations of civil or secular institutions in the newly-settled territory. Almost from the first occupation the desirability of en-

couraging agricultural and other useful industries, whereby the necessities of the military establishments might be supplied at home instead of from abroad, was forced on the authorities, Gov. de Neve's attention having been called to this matter by Viceroy Bucareli. He selected two valleys, one on the Porciuncula (Los Angeles) River, and the other on the Guadalupe, through which valleys he had passed on his journey north in 1777, as being well adapted to agricultural and pastoral pursuits, and also as eligible sites for the location of permanent pueblos or towns.

As showing the constructive statesmanship of Gov. de Neve, as well as the high estimate of his character and ability held by his superiors in authority, it may be noted that, not only was he invited to formulate a reglamento and general plan for the government of the presidios, and of pueblos to be established, etc., but his comprehensive plan, including provisions for colonization and for the distribution of pueblo lands, etc., was approved and adopted almost without change, by decree of the King of Spain, and ordered carried into effect by Croix, Commandante-General of Provincias Internas del Ocidente. The far-reaching effect of some of these "regulations" of Gov. de Neve are felt even by the Anglo-American citizens of Alta California to this day.

Many interesting episodes occurred during Gov. de Neve's administration which are too voluminous for detailed insertion here. Among these may be mentioned the contention that arose between him and President Serra concerning the technical power of the latter to administer the rite of confirmation, in which both the Governor and the President of the missions held out stoutly, and eke conscientiously—as so many representatives of church and state, before and since, have done—for their respective prerogatives. While the differences between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities were earnest, even at times to the point of bitterness, during the rule of de Neve, the contest was carried on at least more decorously and in a more manly fashion than it had been under the rule of his predecessor, de Barri.

Gov. de Neve showed statesmanship of a high order in his recommendations and regulations for the government of the new province, which were carried into effect, partly in his own time, and partly by his successors, and whose influence on the material and social well-being of the settlers was of a permanent and most beneficent

character. Evidently he clearly saw that the missionaries would never be able to convert the Digger Indians of Alta California into self-governing citizens. Therefore he early took steps towards the founding of a civil State by establishing towns or pueblos, which should be entirely separate from and independent of the missionary establishments, and also providing, as an essential part of the plan, for the distribution of pueblo lands to actual settlers, etc.

In September, 1782, de Neve was promoted to the office of Inspector-General de Provincias Internas, and received also the cross of the Order of San Carlos; on the 10th of the same month he was succeeded as Governor by Pedro Fages; and the next year he was appointed Commandante-General de Provincias Internas. He died Nov. 3, 1784.

Gov. de Neve's services and ability were duly appreciated by the governing authorities of New Spain, as is evidenced by the honors conferred upon him as above noted. During the latter portion of his term as Governor of California he resided at San Gabriel, directing the founding of the new pueblo of Los Angeles. Considering its location in the midst of a magnificent and fertile valley, with one of the finest and most genial climates in the world, he must have foreseen with prophetic eye that the modest civic settlement whose foundations he had laid, and in which he apparently took a deep interest, was to have a great future.

Gov. de Neve had no family. In manners he was courteous; and Bancroft with fine antithesis pays him this just compliment, that while other officials followed, more or less faithfully, the policy laid down in superior instructions, he largely dictated that policy; and he further finely says of him: "Finding that the friars would not submit to amicable recognition of the secular authorities, he proposed to restrict their control of the mission temporalities and of the natives, in the interests of colonization, of real civilization and the rights of man."